

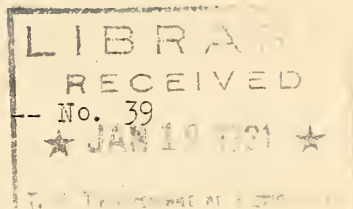
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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLY -- No. 39

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A series of radio talks by W. R. M. Wharton, chief, eastern district, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered Monday mornings at 10 a.m. Eastern Time, through Station WJZ, New York, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations.

Good morning, my radio friends, your Government representative is with you once again to tell you how your foods and drugs are safeguarded through the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act, and to tell you how to read food and drug labels in order that you may become discriminating, careful, exacting, and economical buyers.

My friends, there is a word in the English language which connotes in the popular mind an especially rare edible delicacy. Do you know that word? The significance of the word I have in mind isn't very real in the experience of most of us because many of us have never tasted this delectable viand. Fannie Farmer's Cookbook dismisses the dainty with the words, "too expensive for ordinary use". It is truffles, an edible fungus. Yum! Yum! And truffles and mushrooms, both edible fungi, I shall talk to you about today.

Truffles are known by their common names as white truffles, brown truffles, and black truffles. Black truffles are the most highly priced and these grow in France, reaching various sizes, from the size of a walnut to that of an apple, and they are covered with wart-like protuberances. They possess a strong characteristic aroma and taste.

Truffles, like mushrooms, propagate from rapidly reproducing spores, producing a thread-like growth of a spider web character, which penetrates the soil. This is called the spawn or mycelium and it is from this stage that the truffle develops. An interesting difference between the growth of mushrooms and truffles is that mushrooms grow on top of the soil while truffles grow underneath. Now, I am going to tell you an interesting story about truffles. They are harvested with trained hogs, Yes--- really! I have told you that truffles grow underground. There are no evidences above the ground as to the location of the truffle nor to indicate whether it is at the proper stage of ripening, but ripe truffles have an appealing aroma to hogs and these animals smell the truffle at considerable distances, especially if they have been trained in truffle harvesting. This fact is used by truffle growers to facilitate the harvesting of the product. Hogs are led by ropes to the truffle fields and they upon scenting a ripe truffle, rapidly uncover it with their snouts. When the truffle is uncovered, it sometimes requires a blow on the snout to prevent the hog from eating the truffle. A well trained hog will harvest up to 40 pounds of truffles per day.

Mushroom growing has many interesting features too, but I shall not have time to tell you of these. My job is to teach you how to read labels and my read-the-label subject today is canned mushrooms.

Commercial canned mushrooms are produced in several of the continental European countries, especially France, and the canned product is shipped to the United States. Likewise, cultivated mushrooms are now grown quite largely in the United States and the domestic canned product may be found in many of the grocery stores of the country.

There are many things that the label readers should know about mushrooms in order to be able to discriminate in making purchases, and these I propose to tell you.

Canned mushrooms are packed in hermetically sealed tins of various sizes, ranging upward from the 2-ounce size. The buds are assembled, sized, prepared, washed, blanched with steam or hot water and packed in cans with a brine solution taken from the blanching tanks. This brine solution, because it is composed partially of water of mushrooms, has a flavor of mushrooms. Then, the canned product is processed or sterilized with steam under pressure.

The French word for mushrooms is "Champignons" and this word often appears on labels, but means nothing more than the word mushrooms.

The word "buttons" frequently appears on labels, and this term means the buds or unopened mushrooms gathered before the gills are formed and before the veils break.

Quality in mushrooms is represented by light creamy color and physical perfection--- that is, absence of defects, such as black or brown spots, breaks, over-ripening, and the like. French packers use the terms, "Extras", "First Choice" and "Choice", to represent relative quality. Extras are the most select quality--- they are buttons with the stems cut flush with the caps. First choice is excellent quality representing buttons of good color and with a minimum of defects. Choice is the poorest grade of buttons and mushrooms so designated may be off in color or otherwise defective and they have relatively long stems.

French packers use additional terms to represent the size of the mushroom buttons from small to rather large, as follows:

"Extra Minature", "Minature", "Sur Extra Petite", "Sur Extra", "Small Extras" or "Extra Petite" and "Extras", and these terms are often encountered on labels. They also have a significance as to quality, since, under these names, only Extra quality mushrooms are packed and generally they occur with the stem cut flush with the caps. The "Extra Minature" are the smallest button and they run 150 to 200 in each one-half pound of canned mushrooms. "Minatures" are slightly larger, running from 100 to

150 to each one-half pound. "Sur Extra Petite" run 80 to 100 per one-half pound. "Sur Extras" run 60 to 80. "Small Extras" or "Extra Petites" run from 40 to 60. "Extras" run from 30 to 40 per one-half pound.

Besides whole mushrooms, the French pack a product called "Pieces and Stems", which is composed of broken pieces of mushrooms with an excess of stems obtained from other mushrooms in the process of trimming other grades for canning.

Now, let us consider the terms already referred to as employed by French canners of mushrooms on the basis of their significance of relative money value to us. The most expensive are "Extra Minatures", the "Minatures". Next in price, "Sur Extra Petite," then "Sur Extras", followed by "Small Extras", or "Extra Petites", then "Extras". All are of the extra quality grade - they differ in size only. "First Choice" quality is next in price.

The cheapest grade of whole mushroom is the "Choice" grade, and a product so labeled may be of almost any size with stems up to one inch or longer, but cheaper than the Choice grade of whole mushrooms is the product called, "Pieces and Stems".

American mushroom canners, in general, use only the first grade mushroom buttons for canning, that is essentially perfect undamaged buttons of best quality, and while some domestic packers employ the terms, "First Choice" or "First Choice Buttons" on their labels, these terms are not in general use on American canned mushroom labels. This is because practically all whole mushrooms packed are of the first grade. American packers, in general, follow the practice of packing, (1) "Mushrooms" or "Mushroom buttons", (2) "Sliced Mushrooms" and (3) "Pieces and Stems". The American packers do not go to great length to describe the size. Instead, the American canning practice is, in general, to place the small sizes of buttons in the smaller cans, and vary the size according to the size of the package, refraining from packing very large mushrooms at all as whole mushrooms. For example, usually the very small buttons go into the two-ounce can, a somewhat larger size goes into the four-ounce cans, etc. Moreover, in general, the practice in canning is to leave slightly longer length of stem, as the size of the button increases. Some American packers do not use any label statement to indicate the size of the button, but even so they may sell different sizes under the same brand and label. Your dealer can differentiate these by the color of the can. He may sell you large buttons when you pay the price of small ones unless you compel him to tell you the size of the buttons in the can. Other packers use the terms "Large buttons", "Medium buttons", "Small buttons", "Minatures", and the like, on labels to indicate the size of the mushroom buttons.

"Sliced Mushrooms", when canned, are exclusively an American product, produced from mushrooms which have developed slightly beyond the button state--- that is, with partially open veils or gills partly formed, and those too large for canning. These are whole mushrooms cut with proper length of stem according to size and sliced with machines before canning.

"Pieces and Stems" is also a canned mushroom product of American packers. It consists of broken mushrooms and contains an excess, often a large excess, of added stems obtained in the process of trimming other mushrooms for canning. The French canners have for a long time referred to the "Pieces and Stems" product as "Hotels", and some American packers have adopted the word. When you see it on labels remember that it does not mean the mushroom itself or the buttons but pieces of mushrooms with an excess of stems and should be designated as "pieces and stems".

American packers also put up products known as "Mushroom Juice", "Mushroom Broth", "Mushroom Soup". In the main, products called mushroom juice, broth, and soup are obtained as by-products in the process of blanching mushrooms for canning. During the blanching process, the mushrooms give up part of their water content and this has a mushroom flavor. As sold in cans, such products consist, principally of water, salt and a flavor of mushrooms.

It is important for the label reader to consider carefully the quantity of contents statement on canned mushrooms, for this reason: - one packer may declare net weight of the mushrooms in the can, while another packer may declare the net weight of the entire contents of the can, including the liquid. You will get no more mushrooms from a can labeled, "7 ounces net contents - juice and mushrooms" than you will from a can labeled "4 ounces net weight mushrooms".

In this connection please remember that mushrooms are canned in definite sized cans, namely 2-ounce, 4-ounce, and 8 ounce, etc. which means the quantity of mushrooms in the can, not the total contents of liquid and mushrooms in the can. You will occasionally find on the labels of canned mushrooms a statement something like this. "This can contains 4 ounces net of cooked mushrooms, the equivalent of about 7 ounces fresh mushrooms". This will mean, of course, that in the process of canning some of the water in the fresh mushrooms has been lost but it does not mean that you are getting a larger equivalent in that particular can, than you would in one which is labeled only with the simple statement, "4 ounces net of mushrooms".

Some manufacturers put up a product labeled, "Broiled Mushrooms". These are caps only which have been cooked with butter.

Such terms as, "Hot House Crown", "Natural Flavor", "Unbleached", "Fancy", "The Best Flavor", and the like occur on canned mushroom labels. They have no particular differentiating significance since the terms are generally equally applicable to all American mushroom packers products.

Now, my friends, let me urge you to read labels, to read labels intelligently, and to be sure that you are given the product you wish to buy. Do you yield to the importunities or the convenience of the trades

people with whom you deal, or do you make intelligent selections for yourself? I am urging you, Mrs. Housewife, with all the seriousness that I can command, that it is to your advantage to employ the keenest discrimination in making your purchases, and to bring to bear the fullest information that you can get, if you are to become discriminating, careful, and economical buyers. You may easily become discriminating buyers if you will study my read-the-label broadcasts, and copies of all of my talks will be sent to you on request.

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